Augusta: How One District Studied Its Implementation

Read the Augusta Implementation Study below and discuss implications it has for the following components in your design: collaborative team makeup, administrator role, and on-going data collection.

Augusta Formal Implementation Study

(A synopsis of "School Improvement through Staff Development: Levels of Implementation and Impact on Student Achievement". Showers, 1990)

Case studies of three schools embedded in a larger school improvement effort investigated the implementation of alternative teaching strategies aimed at increasing student achievement and decreasing retentions and office referrals for inappropriate behavior.

Sample

A stratified random sample of 18 teachers (drawn from 110 teachers), six from each of three schools, were the subjects of this study. One teacher was dropped from the sample due to an extended illness. All teachers in the sample had extended training over two years in cooperative learning, inductive thinking and mnemonic strategies.

Data Collection

The seventeen teachers were observed six times during the second year of the project. Teachers maintained logs detailing use of strategies, submitted sample lessons, and 14 of the teachers were videotaped in their classrooms. Informal interviews were conducted with all teachers during year one and formal interviews were conducted in year two of the project. "States of Growth," a measure developed to study responses to learning opportunities, was determined through the formal interview process (see McKibbin & Joyce, Psychological States and Staff Development, 1980).

The variables under study were: frequency of use of each of the strategies and levels of transfer, a quality measure (see Joyce & Showers, *Student Achievement through Staff Development*, 3rd Ed., 2002). The levels of transfer, from low to high, were: imitative (1), mechanical (2), routine (3), integrated (4), executive control (5).

Results

Use of the cooperative strategies was so frequent (many teachers used it daily), we decided to drop it from this analysis and treat it separately. These figures represent use of inductive thinking, concept attainment, and mnemonics.

Frequency of Use

In year one of the project, sample teachers practiced their new strategies an average of 14.5 times per month, and in year two, 22.7 times per month. School average use varied considerably, however. In year one, School A had average use of 17, School B, 11, and School C, 15. School averages for year two were 15, 24, and 29, respectively.

Quality of Use

The mean quality of use for both years was 3.3 (routine use). However, in year one, 11 of the teachers reached routine or integrated levels of use, while in year two, five of the teachers reached levels 4 or 5 on the Transfer of Training Index.

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Frequency of practice with the strategies was correlated with level of transfer at r=.62 in year one and r=.75 in year two (Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient). It would appear that frequent practice of new instructional strategies is essential to skilled and appropriate use of those strategies.

Factors Affecting Variation in Use and Transfer

We examined frequency of use and transfer of training with individual teacher characteristics (States of Growth) and school level factors (principal leadership and functioning of collaborative teams). This study included the six administrators and 110 teachers in all three schools.

States of Growth correlated .87 with transfer of training in year one, and .88 in year two. Years of teaching experience was not a predictor of transfer of training.

Collaborative teams were observed frequently by project staff and school administrators. The functioning of these teams ranged from low (pro forma, or merely going through the motions) to enthusiastic to fully collegial (setting of common goals, planning and development of lessons and units, frequent mutual observation for purposes of personal learning). Collaborative team functioning correlated with individual teacher transfer of training .61. Thus, poorly functioning teams did little to improve transfer of training for the weaker team members, while fully functioning teams lifted the transfer scores for all members.

The support of principals and assistant principals significantly influenced implementation rates at their respective schools. Although there was considerable pressure and support from project staff for all staffs, administrative behaviors affected implementation. A change of principals at School A in year two illustrates the impact of administrative leadership on implementation. Administrative behaviors associated with increased implementation were: attendance at training sessions, practice of strategies in classrooms, frequent informal observations or classroom visits, attendance at collaborative team meetings, sharing of data and celebrating progress.

Summary

The implementation of planned change is crucial to the success of staff development and, thus, school improvement efforts if increased student growth is the intended outcome of such changes. Monitoring of an implementation — including setting a target for implementation, collecting data on an ongoing basis to determine if the goal is being met, and using the data collected to identify obstacles to use of the planned change —empowers staffs and builds confidence in their collective ability to accomplish what they set out to do.

The study of implementation should be an inclusive process — everyone can use it as the basis for an ongoing inquiry into their practices and effects. Rather than having a few persons responsible for the study of implementation, such study should be a normal part of the operation of the school and district.